

# National Socio Economic Development Plan (2006-2010) Mid-Term Review

## Discussion paper from the Education Sector

### 1. Achievements against NSEDP Targets and Strategies

Overall there has been steady progress in the education sector towards NSEDP targets with improvements in key indicators such as net enrolment rates in primary education which have risen to 89.2% towards a target of 90.6% by 2010.

It is clear however that further progress towards NSEDP goals in general will require two fundamental changes. Policies, strategies and targets within the NSEDP will need to:

- ❖ **be included in the forthcoming education strategic plan – the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF)** – and these will need to be consistent with existing key documents including the revised Education Law 2007 and the National Education System Reform Strategy; and
- ❖ **have specific resources, accountabilities and time-frames attached to them** so that the implementation of the NSEDP is strengthened, supported and monitored.

The narrative and tables in Sections 1.1 and 1.2 below summarize progress against the targets and strategies outlined on pages 144-150 of the NSEDP. Additional targets from other sections of the NSEDP that relate to education are shown in Section 1.3.

#### 1.1 General Targets (page 148/9)

One of the key achievements listed under the general targets has been the reform of **teaching and learning methodologies** at pre-primary and primary levels through the implementation of the Ministry of Education (MOE) child friendly schools strategy. This aims to develop schools which are inclusive and well managed with high levels of community participation and in which teaching and learning that is relevant to children's lives is conducted in a safe, healthy and gender responsive environment. A key component of this strategy is developing the abilities of pre-primary and primary teachers to provide them with increased knowledge and skills on using child-friendly school concepts and child-centred teaching and learning approaches in the classroom. This includes multi-grade teaching methodologies and model multi-grade schools have now been established in 11 provinces. Results to date have demonstrated the significant benefits of this holistic child friendly approach to schooling and implementation guidelines are now being developed to expand the initiative nationwide. Overall progress towards this target is thus generally on-track.

To compliment work on updated teaching and learning methodologies, revision of the **pre-primary and primary curricula** has been carried out. A first draft of the pre-primary curriculum, together with teaching units and objectives was produced in June 2008 and is awaiting finalization by MOE. The primary curriculum for Grades 1 to 3 has been revised and work is continuing for the remaining two grades. Revision of the Grade 1 and 2 primary school **text books** to accompany these changes has also taken place and these are now being distributed for use in 2008/9. Revision, editing and reformatting of text books for Grades 3 and 4 has been completed and the bidding process for printing these books is underway. A

first draft of the Grade 5 textbook has been produced and final editing will happen shortly followed by printing and distribution as necessary. In addition to efforts at primary level, work has been done to assess how to integrate knowledge about the environment into the secondary level biology curriculum. Printing of textbooks for lower and upper secondary schools has also taken place and distribution for the 2008/9 academic year is on-going. Progress towards these targets on curricula and textbook revision is therefore good and the target is likely to be achieved.

A major reform of the education system is the plan to introduce the **5-4-3 system of schooling** (5 years of primary, 4 years of lower secondary and 3 of upper secondary) throughout the country. This will bring the Lao education system into line with international norms but obviously requires a significant amount of planning and investment. To date, progress has been made on development of the lower secondary curriculum by subject to accommodate the extra year and this is being done within the overall context of a general curriculum framework for the expected full 12 years of schooling. However there is still a substantial amount of work to be done if this target is to be met and the full implications of the costs involved are not yet known.

Considerable efforts have been made to increase the **quality of teachers** at school level through the development of the Teacher Education Strategy and Action Plan (TESAP) created under the Teacher Training Enhancement and Status of Teachers (TTEST) project. The overall directions of TESAP focus on the improvement of the management of the teacher education system, including adequate teacher production and distribution at all levels to meet the needs of education growth and in accordance with the NSEDP and Education For All (EFA) National Plan of Action. TESAP emphasizes providing teachers with adequate conditions and facilities to perform their teaching tasks and responsibilities. TESAP aims to ensure that teachers receive continuous and systematic upgrading related to their teaching subjects in order for them to become highly skilled and to raise the status of teachers by improving their professional quality and providing appropriate policies for extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. TESAP includes operational plans together with scheduling for implementing activities, quarterly and annual budgets. Implementation of TESAP has already begun and Decrees on the status of teachers and their required professional qualifications were signed by the Prime Minister on 30<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Research into the possibility of creating a specific salary scale for teachers within the civil service structure, so as to recognize their special status and increase their remuneration, has commenced and salaries for teachers are expected to rise in 2008/9. Whilst the TESAP strategy is in place, progress towards improving teacher quality is mixed and implementation of the strategy itself, under the forthcoming ESDF, will need to be accelerated if this target is to be achieved.

The **language of instruction** continues to be a significant challenge, particularly for ethnic groups where knowledge and use of Lao language can be limited. Evidence from previous interventions has demonstrated the benefits of complementing Lao as a second language to the primary curriculum and of developing specific supplementary teaching materials for teaching students from ethnic groups. Ensuring that teachers are trained and facilitated to teach Lao in addition to their ethnic language has been found to be of great value for primary students that do not speak Lao at home. A pilot has been conducted in Oudomxay province on teaching Lao to students from ethnic groups using three specialized techniques and the results are expected shortly. Training has also taken place for teachers, education administrators and technical staff on curriculum development for ethnic groups. Work is now underway to consolidate the lessons learned from all these efforts in Lao PDR over the past decade, guided by the NSEDP target (on page 100) of teaching ethnic languages in schools

where ethnic characters/alphabets already exist, and to feed these into specific language policies of the ESDF.

**Construction of learning institutions**, including kindergartens, primary/secondary and vocational schools has taken place at the same time as work to amalgamate villages and make best use of scarce resources. Thus the opening of new facilities has often been accompanied by the closure of non-cost effective institutions elsewhere, particularly at lower secondary level, and overall figures can therefore mask progress which has been made. There are now 1,170 kindergartens, 8,740 primary schools (of which 4,050 or 46% are complete), 681 secondary schools (of which 328 or 48% are complete), 12 Vocational Training Institutions and 17 Technical Education Institutions. The NSEDP only indicates that *more* learning institutions need to be created, so it is difficult to assess progress against a specific target.

Ensuring **quality** in education continues to be of paramount importance and the first steps have now been taken on developing primary school quality standards in line with internationally accepted norms which are intended to set the minimum input standards for all primary schools. The legal framework for education was enhanced and updated in 2007 through the revision and formal adoption by the National Assembly of the new Education Law on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2007. However the NSEDP target of reaching international standards in quality education at all levels by 2010 is unlikely at the current rate of progress.

**Community participation**, one of the key characteristics of a child-friendly school, has increased with the establishment of Pupil-Parent Associations and Village Education Development Committees in large numbers of villages/schools nationwide together with EFA committees at district and provincial levels. Given progress to date, it is probable that this broad NSEDP target of improving community participation will be achieved.

To ensure the **organizational and administrative framework** of MOE is designed to effectively implement the on-going reform processes a restructuring exercise was conducted in 2007-8, with the associated Decree being formally signed by the Prime Minister on 7<sup>th</sup> April 2008. This restructuring has created several new departments and functions, including centres for quality assurance and promotion of gender, ethnicity and inclusive education, both of which clearly demonstrate MOE's commitment to focusing on quality and access as central pillars of its reform. Roles, responsibilities and tasks of Provincial Education Services (PES) and District Education Bureaus (DEB) are also being revised as part of the restructuring exercise and are expected to be completed by October 2008. They will then be formally approved and authorized before being put into practice. The revision of PES and DEB roles is taking into account efforts to decentralize work where possible but as yet this is concentrating on division of administrative tasks and spreading workloads more evenly, not on delegating authority for decision-making (and this work is being done within the framework of the law on local administration). **Decentralization of financial management** has been supported by the signing of a Prime Minister's Decree which puts into operation new legislation on use and reporting of funds and clarifies the delegation of authority between central and local levels. Overall progress on improving central and regional management, administration and financial operations is steady but will need sustained inputs if the NSEDP targets are to be achieved.

MOE increasingly recognizes the importance of the DEB in improving delivery of education services and conducted **training of DEB Chiefs in planning and management** in 140 districts. Training of technical staff within the DEBs to compliment this upgrading of DEB Chiefs is on-going. At the school level, management of facilities and human resources is critical to enhance the learning outcomes of children and MOE is currently training 1,450

school principals on school management techniques in pursuit of this goal. Additional capacity building on education management and administration is also being carried out with staff from schools, DEBs and PESs.

**Improving the flow of funds to schools and institutions** is being tackled through the development of a standard set of unit costs per student. Once this has been agreed it will provide a simple and effective mechanism by which to increase the amount of money reaching learning establishments. With increased funds comes the need to enhance financial management skills of PESs and DEBs and plans are underway for training staff once the Decree to implement the revised Education Law 2007 has been finalized and signed by the Prime Minister. Efforts to **reduce the cost burdens on the poorest families** are also being undertaken through drafting legislation on exemption of tuition fees as well as providing incentives for poor families, especially girls, in target villages to help them with the direct costs of schooling (uniforms, learning materials etc). Thus, progress in terms of the legal and administrative processes is good and will need to be matched by similar developments in actual flows of funds if the targets are to be achieved.

An additional achievement (which is not a specific target in the NSEDP) has been the drafting of a holistic **Early Childhood Development (ECD)** policy with partners from relevant line ministries including Health, Social Welfare, Education, Justice, National Assembly and mass organizations such as the Lao Women's Union and Lao Youth Union. This policy, which is still under development, aims to enable all children in Lao PDR to achieve their full potential and is therefore comprehensive and includes all aspects of development and growth. The efforts of the policy will be directed to ensure that all children are prepared to adapt, succeed and achieve in all situations. The policy is committed to implementing the survival, development, protection and participation rights for all children.

Supplementary targets in the education sector (on page 150 of the NSEDP) include the following:

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Reproductive health and HIV/AIDS</b>	Develop instructional and reading materials on life skills to prevent the spread of the disease	A reproductive health / HIV/AIDS / Sexually Transmitted Infection and drugs education curriculum (instructional and reading materials) using a life-skills approach has been integrated into school subjects and textbooks and implemented in 75% of all secondary schools and 19% of all complete primary schools. An innovative programme using Buddhist monks and nuns has also developed a life-skills curriculum on HIV/AIDs for use in secondary schools.
<b>Drug Control</b>	Develop awareness programmes to help eradicate drug use among students	Drug education is included in the life-skills curriculum outlined above. Additional nationwide awareness programmes through the education system have yet to be implemented.
<b>Information and Communications Technology (ICT)</b>	The Government will encourage investment and training in ICT and facilitate internet usage	Investment in ICT infrastructure and services has taken place with internet usage now common in most major provincial capitals. Over 20 secondary schools have received funds from donors to establish ICT rooms and internet access and in some cases this has been combined with support from communities (eg for construction of computing labs)
<b>Distance Education</b>	Create a distance education centre at the National University	The distance education centre has now been established at NUOL.

	of Laos	
<b>Unexploded Ordinance (UXO)</b>	Mainstream UXO awareness into standard teaching schedules	The issue of mainstreaming UXO awareness will be one of the main points of discussion at regional meetings scheduled for July 2008. One potential scenario is that UXO awareness media will be integrated into the "Blue Box" school health program
<b>School Feeding</b>	Promote primary school participation in food-insecure areas through a school-feeding programme	School feeding programmes supported by external partners (for example World Food Programme) are now operating in food-insecure areas in the three Northern provinces of Oudomxay, Phongsaly and Luangnamtha. Posters promoting the initiative were distributed in target districts. The programme will expand to Saravan, Xekong and Attapeu in 2008-9.

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Population</b>	Strengthen research and instructional capacity to balance population growth and socio-economic development	This is a very broad target. Research capacity has been strengthened both at the Research Institute for Education Sciences (RIES) and at the National Statistics Centre but it is difficult to say whether this has led to any changes in balance between population growth and socio-economic development.
<b>Health Education</b>	Integrate health education and promotion into the primary and secondary curriculum and expand school sanitation	A nutrition curriculum on iodine deficiency disorders and young child feeding practices has been developed by the MOE for primary schools. 300 teachers were trained in 2007 and 500 will be trained in Savannakhet and Xiengkhouang in 2008. Training for teachers about health and hygiene promotion within the context of "The World Around Us" in Grade 1, 2 and 3 has also taken place in Attapeu and Saravan. A pilot programme to integrate primary health care issues into primary textbooks is underway in Oudomxay. School sanitation continues to be a priority and the number of schools with water supplies and separate latrines for girls and boys have increased.
<b>Gender Equity</b>	Mainstream gender equity into virtually all activities and create a number of specific "pro-girls" activities	<p>A large number of "pro-girls" activities and initiatives have been undertaken in support of this NSEDP target including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Production of supplementary teaching materials under the Lao-Australia Basic Education Project (which were focused on girls and are more gender sensitive)</li> <li>• Training of formal and non-formal curriculum developers under the GENIA programme to improve overall gender concepts and perspectives. These have now been mainstreamed into the new primary curriculum under the Second Education Development Project (EDPII)</li> <li>• Gender awareness training workshops for senior educators at all levels</li> <li>• Research into gender issues and evaluations of case studies</li> <li>• Recruitment and training of female teachers and Pedagogical Advisers from ethnic groups</li> <li>• Creation of a centre for promotion of education for women, those with disabilities and those from</li> </ul>

		ethnic groups under MOE's restructuring exercise
		Specific gender mainstreaming tools are due to be developed under the Vientiane Declaration and will be fully integrated into the ESDF. Gender parity is moving in the right direction overall but there are still significant challenges to achieve gender equity.
<b>Children with Special Needs</b>	Focus on inclusive education	The recent MOE restructuring exercise has resulted in a centre which will focus on inclusive education under cross-cutting policies and strategies to be developed in the ESDF.

## 1.2 Sub Sector Targets

All quantitative progress information listed in this section comes from the Education Management Information System (EMIS).

### ❖ EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE and EDUCATION (*page 146*)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Enrolment rate</b>	11% (3-4 year olds) 30% (5-year olds)	10.7% (3-4 year olds) 24.3% (5-year olds)
<b>Primary preparation classes</b>	Establish special primary school classes to prepare five-year old children for Grade 1	705 pre-primary classes are now in operation
<b>Teacher training</b>	Kindergarten teachers will be properly trained and a curriculum developed with toys and aids	First draft of pre-primary curriculum developed by June 2008. Pre-primary teachers are currently being trained under the child friendly schools strategy.

### ❖ PRIMARY EDUCATION (*page 146*)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Complete schools</b>	Convert 80% of incomplete schools to complete schools	8% converted by 2006/7
<b>Access to schools</b>	Provide access to primary schools to children from all under-served villages	<i>Data not yet available</i>
<b>Gross enrolment rate</b>	96.8 % (Girls: 95.8%, Boys: 97.8%)	121.1% (Girls: 114.4%, Boys 127.6%)
<b>Net enrolment rate</b>	90.6% (Girls: 89.7%, Boys: 91.4%)	89.2% (Girls: 87.0%, Boys 91.4%)
<b>Repetition rates for Grade 1</b>	5% (for both boys and girls)	32% (Girls: 31.1%, Boys 32.8%)
<b>Drop-out rates in Grade 1</b>	5% (for both boys and girls)	10.7% (Girls: 10.3%, Boys 32.8%)
<b>Drop-out rates in Grade 5</b>	5% (for both boys and girls)	7% (Girls: 6.0%, Boys 7.8%)
<b>Completion rate<sup>1</sup></b>	77.4% (Girls 75.4%, Boys: 79.5%)	62.1% (Girls: 63.6%, Boys 60.9%)
<b>Pupil teacher ratio</b>	31:1	30:1

<sup>1</sup> Completion rates are the proportion of students who enter grade 5 who pass the final examination.

❖ SECONDARY EDUCATION (page 147)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Access</b>	Achieve parity between boys and girls in access to lower secondary education, particularly in ethnic minority and poor areas.	Moving in the right direction. In 2006/7 the national gross enrolment for lower secondary was 47.5% for females and 58.9% for males, while upper secondary gross enrolment was 29.7% for females and 39.5% for males. There are still significant regional variations. Disaggregated data by ethnic group and poverty level is not yet available.
<b>Transition rates from Grade 5 to 6</b>	82.5%	78.9% (Girls: 76.9%, Boys: 80.6%)
<b>Attendance rate in lower secondary</b>	68.4%	<i>Data not yet available</i>
<b>Attendance rate in upper secondary</b>	40%	<i>Data not yet available</i>

❖ NON-FORMAL EDUCATION (page 147)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Reported adult literacy rate</b>	98% (by 2015)	73%
<b>Tested basic adult literacy rate</b>	61% (by 2015)	51%
<b>Annual enrolments</b>	20% of the primary drop-outs in NFE courses and 2% of the illiterate adults in literacy programmes.	<i>Data not yet available</i>

❖ TERTIARY EDUCATION (page 148)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Development of universities, colleges, high schools and vocational training networks</b>	Develop a master plan for the development of these learning institutions	A master plan for the development of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sub-sector has been developed. A draft strategy for has been produced and will be revised in conjunction with the development of the ESDF.
<b>Construction</b>	Construct a university in Luang Prabang and a technical college in Luang Namtha.	The current construction phase of Souphanouvong University in Luang Prabang finished in 2007. The survey for the technical college in Luangnamtha has been completed and construction will begin in 2008/9.
<b>Teaching capacities</b>	Upgrade capacities of teachers and professors in universities in Vientiane, Savannakhet and Luang Namtha.	Capacities of teachers and professors at the National University of Laos (NUOL) have been enhanced through a mixture of short and long-term courses (both internal and overseas).



❖ TERTIARY EDUCATION (*continued*)

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>University libraries and laboratories</b>	Upgrade libraries and laboratories in the three national-level universities	Upgrading libraries and laboratories at all national universities is on-going (more and better quality resources such as books/journals, internet facilities and equipment)
<b>Bachelor's &amp; Master's degree curricula</b>	Improve the Bachelor's degree curriculum and develop Master's degree curriculum	The Bachelor's degree has been improved and Master's degree has been created with a number of subjects including Business Administration and Education Management.
<b>Teaching institutions</b>	Establish high-level technical schools for each area of industry, middle-level technical schools for agriculture and 2-3 teacher colleges.	Only one additional teacher college has been established. No dedicated high-level technical schools relating directly to industry have yet been created.
<b>Vocational schools</b>	Expand and improve vocational schools to enable them to receive students from secondary schools. Develop vocational high schools in Xiengkhouang, Huaphanh and Oudomxay.	Expanding vocation schools is part of the TVET master plan and so will be covered by the ESDF. The first phase of vocational high schools established facilities in Oudomxay, Xiengkhouang and Phongsaly. The second phase will expand to Luangnamtha, Sayaboury and Huaphanh.
<b>Vocational and Technical curricula</b>	Develop curricula for vocational and technical education that is relevant to the needs of the domestic and regional labour markets and supply schools with proper instructional materials.	The Vocational Education Development Centre is responsible for vocational and technical curricula which have been revised to better meet the needs of local industry and commerce.
<b>Policy development</b>	Establish policy to encourage households to send their children to study abroad and then return and serve the country.	No official policy yet exists but several schemes are underway from foreign governments to facilitate the study of students overseas and their subsequent return.
<b>Scientific research</b>	Increase investment in scientific research and establish research centres and laboratories for universities. Reform curriculum and teaching methods to train high-quality workers.	An ICT Research Centre has been established. Over 30 research activities are currently on-going.
<b>Professional skills of business people</b>	Encourage businesses to upgrade the quality of professional skills of business people, particularly in business administration, technical knowledge and foreign languages.	The Lao-India Enterprise Development Centre now provides courses for business people to upgrade their technical skills.



### 1.3 Additional education-related targets under broader poverty reduction policies

ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Training centres in Northern, Central and Southern regions</b>	Develop these training centres to help the provinces to increase the employability of people	The training centres have been developed in all three regions but with no specific research having been carried out, it is difficult to assess whether they have increased employability of people thus far.
<b>Labour market testing</b>	Undertake labour market testing to better link vocational training to needs	A number of surveys have been carried out and are underway to make sure vocational training courses are relevant and producing graduates with appropriate skills. Getting this connection right will depend on continuous labour market testing in the future.
<b>Pro-poor education policy</b>	Develop a special policy on access to school of children from poor families	This has not happened as yet due to the fact that the ESDF is still under discussion and final policies are not yet in place. The need to develop a special policy for poor families will form part of the ESDF.
ISSUE	TARGET	PROGRESS BY 2008
<b>Ethnic groups and languages</b>	Increase people's awareness on preservation and promotion of cultural values and traditions of all ethnic groups. Sustain and develop spoken languages and written characters/alphabets. Teach ethnic dialects in schools where ethnic characters/alphabets already exist.	Apart from supplementary materials for teaching ethnic students, there has been limited tangible progress to date. Discussions are now underway to investigate how to move forward to ensure this NSEDP target is specifically addressed in the ESDF. One challenge is that there appears to be a difference between the target and the revised Education Law 2007 that will need to be resolved.
<b>Teachers from ethnic groups</b>	Increase the number of ethnic teachers, particularly female	Interventions prior to the start of the 6 <sup>th</sup> NSEDP, such as the Lao-Australia Basic Education Project, greatly increased the numbers of ethnic, mainly female teachers. Lessons from this approach will feed into the development of ESDF policies.
<b>Locally appropriate education policies</b>	Encourage provinces and districts to develop locally appropriate materials to supplement the core curriculum, and to schedule primary and secondary school classes to encourage school attendance	Materials under the child-friendly schools approach developed locally but more needs to be done to ensure these and other materials are locally appropriate. Local re-scheduling of classes yet to take place.
<b>Access for girls - Dormitories</b>	Build dormitories for female students who live long distances from schools	The majority of dormitories are "informal" and construction of new facilities has taken place but been limited. A study of informal boarders is currently underway. Safety of informal and formal facilities is a key issue,

		particularly for girls.
<b>Access to vocational and technical schools</b>	Develop distance learning and “bridging” courses to enable students (particularly women) to enter vocational and technical schools	This has not happened to date but again is captured under the TVET strategy and associated master-plan so now has costs and responsibilities attached to it.

## 2 Challenges and Constraints in meeting the targets

### 2.1 Planning and Design

**Strategic planning** – one of the key constraints in meeting NSEDP targets in education has been the lack of an overarching strategic plan for the whole sector to define priorities, guide resource allocation and ensure balanced development of the sector. This situation has also prevented an application to the Fast Track Initiative (through which additional resources under the Catalytic Fund may be available) as a “credible strategic plan” is a pre-requisite for FTI accession.

Since 2001 the MOE has expressed interest adopting a more programme-based approach in education through moving towards a Sector Wide Approach (SWAp) methodology but has, as yet, been unable to make sufficient progress in turning this into a reality. Implementing a SWAp in the education sector would mean greater clarity in terms of priority policies, more efficient use of resources and potentially increased funds from donors. The net result of this approach is likely to have a significant impact on education outcomes. A number of articulate plans and strategies exist (such as the Education Strategic Planning 20 years 2001 – 2020, the National Education System Reform Strategy and the Education For All National Plan of Action – EFA NPA) but none of these adequately considers the whole sector, its policies, plans of action and costs.

Recognizing this key constraint, MOE has embarked upon the production of a strategic plan – the Education Sector Development Framework (ESDF) – which will set out the policies, strategies, implementation plans, monitoring systems and overall financing plans and costs for the next 10 years. In addition, MOE and Development Partners (DPs) have specifically outlined the need for the development of the ESDF to extend beyond the MOE itself and include full and active participation of key government stakeholders such as Ministry of Finance, the Public Administration and Civil Service Agency and the Ministry of Planning and Investment.

❖ *To accelerate progress towards NSEDP targets it is imperative that the ESDF sets out a bold vision for change, aligned to the NSEDP, which clearly identifies priority areas and matches these with sufficient resources to ensure such reforms can take place.*

**Implementation plans** – the EFA NPA sets out an ambitious but well structured and coherent set of policies and actions to achieve EFA goals which consequently feed into NSEDP targets. Progress against EFA goals though (as highlighted in the recent EFA Mid-Decade Assessment report) has been disappointing and renewed efforts must be made to tackling some of the key issues such as access to basic education, drop-out and repetition rates.

One way of improving progress is to put increased efforts on turning well-developed strategies (under the ESDF) into explicit and clearly defined implementation plans that guide MOE departments and divisions, provincial and district authorities and schools as well as DP assistance.

- ❖ *It is critical therefore that the ESDF provides a mechanism for developing detailed and achievable implementation plans to operationalize policies and strategies at central, provincial, district and school level to ensure continued progress towards NSEDP targets.*

## 2.2 Resources

**Government budget** – the education sector’s share of the 2007/8 recurrent budget is 553 Billion Kip (out of a total budget of 5,442 Billion Kip) which amounts to 10.2% against a target of 14.0% by 2010. The majority of these funds are used for salaries with very little left over to actually support the reform of the system. Donors and community contributions therefore provide funds to support what would normally be considered to be items under a government’s recurrent budget.

- ❖ *If the Government of Laos (GoL) is to achieve the targets set out in the NSEDP it must devote an increasingly higher share of the budget to the education sector. However, it is worth noting that even if additional resources are committed, not all programs can be implemented and MOE must therefore make some difficult choices by prioritizing the most important policies.*

**National-provincial priorities** – allied to the overall low level of Government spending in education is that unequal allocation of scarce resources continues to impact heavily at provincial, district and school levels due to the fact that provincial governors still maintain high degrees of autonomy in terms of revenue collection and public spending. In effect this often means that provincial level priorities take precedence over national strategies and thus although policies may be in place to target pressing education issues, in reality resources may be allocated elsewhere.

- ❖ *There is an urgent need for national policies to be enforced, poor provinces to receive sufficient funds and resources channeled to schools according to priority objectives and targets.*

## 2.3 Data Availability

**Education Management Information System (EMIS)** – the education system relies heavily on the only annually nationally available data set which is produced by the EMIS. A diagnostic study of EMIS in 2006-7 concluded that “EMIS must be a reliable tool in making policy decisions on education” and that in order to achieve this goal a significant number of changes need to be made to strengthen the system including recruiting more staff, investing in new technology and establishing official school catchment areas. There is a tendency to make the process of school mapping a complicated exercise with Graphical Information System based EMIS approaches but experience has demonstrated this is often not based on school/community needs and that simpler, school-based work (such the Demand Driven Approach to achieving EFA goals in Feung and Sanakham districts) can be more effective.

All of these changes will help improve the quality and speed with which data can be collected, analyzed and disseminated.

To address the recommendations arising from the EMIS diagnostic study, a 3-year strategy and implementation plan has now been drafted but will need further revisions (particularly in light of emerging priorities from the ESDF) before it can be put into operation. However, in order to ensure future availability of reliable data which can be used to measure progress against NSEDP policies and feedback effectively into the development and refinement of these policies, EMIS will need increased levels of support from MOE and DPs overall.

- ❖ *It is therefore important that future assistance, under the umbrella of the ESDF, targets the upgrading of EMIS and facilitates decentralized national dissemination of information for planning and management purposes as well as training of staff in data collection and analysis from central through to the district and school levels.*

## 2.4 Capacity

Capacity, both of the system as a whole and of individuals, continues to be a constraint which is hampering the education sector's ability to fully achieve NSEDP targets. MOE is a large and complex organization which has the government's largest civilian workforce. Lines of communication and authority vary from those which are centralized (such as the budget allocation, management of personnel and curriculum development) to those which are decentralized (such as teaching). Coordinated and systematic capacity development to fulfill NSEDP aims is needed in terms of management, pedagogy and administration.

**School level** – at school level a variety of factors combine to prevent increasing the capacity of teachers and school directors at a sufficient pace. Access to rural and remote areas is difficult, especially in the rainy season when some villages are effectively cut off from the rest of the country. Although MOE has implemented the NSEDP strategy to develop Pedagogical Advisers, their workload is diverse (both in content and in location) as well as heavy and thus they are often unable to undertake all the tasks assigned to them. The key effect of this situation is that teachers do not receive adequate in-service support, particularly where they have received training to upgrade their skills and need follow-up assistance in order to put this into practice.

**Provincial/District level** – the continued proliferation of projects (see 2.7 below) coupled with the lack of an overarching strategic framework and associated detailed implementation plan mean that the work of provincial and district level staff often has to respond to competing, rather than complimentary needs. This is reinforced by disparities in resource allocation (see 2.2 above) and results in inefficient use of staff with competent individuals often taking on unequal shares of overall office tasks.

**At the central MOE level** – the sheer volume of work, which tends to fall on a limited number of senior staff is overwhelming and is further complicated by the need to respond to a large number of donors on a regular and individual basis. The absence of a unifying strategic document and implementation plan has the same effect as that at provincial/district level with activities often being carried out on an adhoc and/or uncoordinated basis.

Significant resources have been put into developing capacities at all levels of the system but they have had minimal impact in terms of long-lasting and systemic changes. Key reasons

include un-systematic approaches, over-emphasis on training, lack of leadership and ownership from MOE, unclear organizational goals/priorities and uncoordinated interventions leading to duplication and overlap. GoL/MOE fully understand the need to adopt a more holistic approach and are addressing the issue through the production of a Capacity Development Framework (CDF) under the commitments made in the Vientiane Declaration on aid effectiveness. The CDF will provide baseline information, interventions needed together with time-bound targets and results with associated performance indicators. Through a participatory and consensus building approach, the CDF will enable mapping of the MOE's functions at all levels and facilitate the production of plan to enhance capacities in a structured and coherent fashion.

- ❖ *The education CDF needs to be embedded within the emerging ESDF and result in a clear, simple and useable plan behind which government and DPs can align their joint support to ensure increased capacities of MOE staff to achieve NSEDP targets. There is also a need to introduce a delegation mechanism into the management culture since building capacity across staff will not be effective if they are not given some degree of autonomy in decision-making.*

## 2.5 Service Delivery

Better service delivery takes into account issues relating to access, quality and institutional development and capacity building. Key constraints in each of these areas is as follows:

**Access** – the availability of physical facilities and trained human resources is the major challenge relating to access as there are insufficient pre-schools for 3-5 year old children, complete primary, lower and upper secondary schools and technical and vocational education training establishments. This issue is further compounded in remote rural areas where children from ethnic groups have difficulty in understanding Lao language and thus although they may even be present in the learning environment, they cannot sufficiently access and make full use of the education services they are being offered. Children with disabilities and girls also face both physical and social access issues which will require specific and sustained policies and associated actions in order for them to be properly addressed. Sparsely located schools in mountainous remote areas also means it is much harder to monitor the progress of planned implementations.

**Quality** – a useful, relevant and appropriate curriculum aligned to international standards is essential if the broader socio and economic needs of the country, outlined in the NSEDP, are to be met. Although work has been done to revise the primary curriculum and its textbooks, the secondary level and TVET curricula are still not able to produce people with the right types of skills for today's labour markets. Existing assessment and examinations systems are weak and do not provide valid and reliable evidence of students' achievements and although the TESAP strategy is in place, it has yet to yield sufficient outputs to address quality issues.

**Institutional development and capacity building** – there are systemic institutional and capacity weaknesses at all levels of the education system (as outlined in section 2.4 above). Limited management and planning skills coupled with the disconnect between national-provincial policies (see 2.2 above), weak financing strategy, poor enforcement of regulatory frameworks and uncoordinated capacity development initiatives impact heavily on ability of the system to provide high quality, accessible services.

**Community participation** – as outlined in Section 1.1, a critical aspect of improved quality in schools are the levels of engagement and participation from community members in terms of monitoring and supporting school activities. Presently there are huge variations across the country in terms of the extent to which this happens and there is often overlap between the various education-related committees at local level (eg the Village Education Committees and the Parent-Pupil Associations).

*The delivery of services needs to be improved in order to meet NSEDP targets through:*

- ❖ *Increasing the number of learning establishments and trained professional staff*
- ❖ *Creating strategies for facilitating better access for girls, people from ethnic groups and children with disabilities*
- ❖ *Developing curricula and assessments/exams at all levels which are relevant and meet international standards*
- ❖ *Supporting and strengthening the implementation of the teacher education strategy*
- ❖ *Strengthening management at all levels through a single coordinated capacity development framework*
- ❖ *Implementing the revised Education Law 2007*
- ❖ *Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of community-based associations/committees and mobilizing them to assist and monitor the functions of the school*

## 2.6 Internal Efficiency

According to the latest statistics, about 30% of primary school students repeat grade 1 and approximately 20% repeat grade 2. On average, around 8 years are required for a student to progress through the primary system due to repetitions and drop-outs. The factors affecting these indicators are diverse and inter-connected and include school-related issues such as quality and access as well as broader socio-economic issues such as income generation and health. Internal efficiency has improved but it is not progressing at a rate which will be enough to achieve the NSEDP targets.

- ❖ *The ESDF needs to develop robust policies to tackle the issue of repetition and drop-out in primary education and its subsequent effect on the throughput of students in lower and upper secondary schools if NSEDP targets are to be met.*

## 2.7 Vientiane Declaration and Donor Coordination

With the advent of the Vientiane Declaration and its associated Country Action Plan (CAP), there is much greater emphasis on government ownership and management and on coordination between DPs. In the education sector the main vehicle for coordination is the Education Sector Working Group (ESWG) which has developed into a constructive working forum for increased harmonization and dialogue throughout the sector. The ESWG developed a work-plan for 2007-8 and significant progress has been made on the joint commitments outlined in the CAP.

The ESWG is also actively involved with the development of the ESDF which will be the key mechanism through which donors will align their support, coordinate their activities and meet their obligations under the Vientiane Declaration.

Despite the positive progress of the ESWG and momentum generated by the on-going development of the ESDF, two constraints in the broader context of the sector have hindered progress towards NSEDP targets:

1. Provincial level coordination of DP interventions is mixed. There are still a large number of projects which are on-going and which often have similar mandates and/or coverage areas. More work needs to be done to assist provincial and district authorities to consolidate similar activities and coordinate inputs and support at school/district/provincial levels.
  2. Both government and DPs need to do much more to mainstream the principles of the Vientiane Declaration and to undertake the activities outlined in the CAP. Although specific focal points have been identified, there needs to be greater common action towards implementing the agreed activities.
- ❖ *More resources need to be allocated by MOE and DPs to implement the CAP actions and deliver on the Vientiane Declaration commitments. This enhanced emphasis on more efficient use of aid through moving to a more sector-wide based approach under the ESDF, will have direct and positive impacts on NSEDP targets.*

### **3. Priorities for the sector for the remaining period of the 6<sup>th</sup> NSEDP**

This mid-term review of the NSEDP indicates that some progress has been made towards achieving the 2010 targets in education. However some key priorities, which are consistent with the recent EFA MDA report and draft school sector inputs of the ESDF, emerge as follows:

- ❖ **formulating a comprehensive yet understandable ESDF** which clearly sets out bold priority policies for the whole sector which are driven by NSEDP targets and supported by a realistic assessment of available resources;
- ❖ providing more access to primary education for children, especially in remote rural areas, and increasing participation in lower secondary education;
- ❖ making the primary sector more efficient through reduction of repetition and drop-outs;
- ❖ reducing the cost barriers to education for children from the poorest families, especially those in ethnic areas through the School Feeding Project and/or scholarship programmes and developing a strategy for elimination of cost barriers altogether;
- ❖ encouraging parental support for, and active involvement with, their children's education;
- ❖ developing a curriculum which is responsive to local needs;
- ❖ improving the quality of primary, secondary and tertiary education so that the outcomes match the needs for a skilled population able to participate in the global economy;
- ❖ designing programs which will allow for school failures and drop-outs to re-enter the education system to realize their potential;
- ❖ ensuring that disadvantaged groups including females, those with physical and mental disabilities, and those who do not speak Lao in their communities have access to quality education provision;



- ❖ enhancing the collection, management and dissemination of data for education planning and evaluation of the impact of NSEDP policies; and
- ❖ providing sustained technical expertise to MOE at central, provincial and district levels to assist in translating the broad strategic directions in the ESDF into annual management and implementation plans to ensure activities actually take place in support of the above goals.